

Dialogue

*Austronesian Youth Perspectives on Language Reclamation
and Maintenance*

EMERSON LOPEZ ODANGO

Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-Natives

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*A Sea of Warriors: Performing an Identity of Resilience and
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*Austronesian Youth Perspectives
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၎င်းတို့သည် ဗုဒ္ဓ၏ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန် အားထုတ်ကြသည်။

Kung hindi maayos, ayusin natin.

(If it's not right, let's fix it.)

—EMERENCIO O ODANGO

I begin this essay with a quote from my father, a *kasabihan* (saying) in Tagalog that serves as a mantra for the way I lead my personal and professional life. In an academic context, I find the *kasabihan* to be applicable in contexts of “gaps”: if there is a perceived gap in the literature on a given topic, and such gaps in knowledge are seen as “problems”—that is, at least, from certain Western scientific perspectives—then one way of addressing such a gap is to write about it and contribute to the growth of that literature. Not all gaps in knowledge are necessarily problems, as James Clifford has asserted regarding accepting “partial truths” as part of the art of writing ethnographies (1986). However, when gaps occur due to the relative silence of voices—regardless of whether such voices are actively suppressed or have spoken up but remain a minority in the wider academic discourse—then that is a problem that has an answer: speak up more, speak louder, speak more clearly.

This dialogue piece addresses the relative lack of youth perspectives in the academic literature on language shift, endangerment, reclamation, and maintenance. In another article (Odango forthcoming a), I argue that one of the most important ways to address the matter of intergenerational language shift—in which, across generations, the younger generation becomes fluent in a different language than what the older generation speaks—is

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to encourage the further integration of youth perspectives into these academic discourses, especially (but not exclusively) perspectives written by young scholars who are speaker-members of communities in which language shift is occurring. Through such perspectives, we can gain more nuanced understandings of youth perceptions about language shift in their communities, the effects on their linguistic identities, and their motivations for reclaiming (or letting go of) their ancestral/heritage languages.

While my argument in Odango forthcoming serves as clarification of the “call” to youth, my discussion of youth examples of language shift and reclamation in that article is limited to my own reflections as a member of a diasporic Filipino community in which there is shift away from Tagalog to English. In this essay, I explore perspectives shared with me by members of my generational cohort as a way of telling other stories of youth who are engaged in lifelong journeys to reclaim and hold on to their languages for reasons that are inherently tied to personal identities. Due to the nature of the array of languages I discuss here, an Austronesian perspective emerges, one that I draw on for personal inspiration: the challenges I face as a Filipino are shared by other members of my cohort with Austronesian ancestry. It is an immeasurable source of support, knowing that there are other young Austronesians like me who are fighting to hold on to their languages against all odds.

This dialogue piece, then, is an effort to rectify a matter that, at least to me, is *hindi maayos* (not right): the relative dearth of youth perspectives in the academic discourses on language shift, endangerment, reclamation, and maintenance. The youth indeed have much to say. My aims are to add to this growing body of literature and to encourage other scholars to continue to do the same.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSES OF LANGUAGE SHIFT AND ENDANGERMENT

For several decades now, discourses on language shift as caused by a breakdown in intergenerational transmission of language (Fishman 1991, 2001) as well as those on language endangerment (Hale and others 1992) have underscored the importance of addressing the impending loss of thousands of languages around the world. While the literature on language maintenance and revitalization focuses on practical matters of building new generations of speakers of the minority/ancestral/heritage language (Hinton and Hale 2001), much of the literature on language shift and

endangerment focuses on issues such as the causes (ie, voluntary language shift in modern contexts) and the effects (eg, the loss of global linguistic diversity). Authors sometimes admit that it can be difficult to develop such a literature since many of the examples focus on the failures (compare Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998, 57), which can lead to overwhelmingly negative and fatalistic perceptions about the “inevitable” effects of language shift. And even though my perspective as a linguist focuses primarily on language, it is clear that discourses of “decline” around the world encompass changes not only in language but also in family structures, local governance, knowledge about and stewardship of the local environment, and culture in general.¹

As I discuss in *Odango* forthcoming a, much—but certainly not all—of the academic discourses on language shift and endangerment are older generation centric: the reports of linguists and anthropologists often privilege the perspectives of the older generation. It is the community elders who are quoted as saying that the youth do not care about the language, or experienced teachers who report that the changes that young heritage- or second-language students are creating in the language are “wrong.” Such reports beg the question, “What do the youth have to say about the matter?” Are the youth indeed “turning away” from the language, or are they changing it in new ways that contest traditional definitions of authenticity? Is language even the most meaningful mode through which young people construct identities in this late modern world? For every report of a parent who bemoans her or his child giving up the language, where is the report of the parent who is surprised that the child chooses to relearn the language of her or his own volition—and in either case, where is the report of that child’s perspective? As Leisy Wyman, Teresa McCarty, and Sheila Nicholas observed, the “commonplace rhetorics of endangerment . . . tend to invisibilize youth perspectives, concerns, and practices within language reclamation efforts” (2014, 2).

There is already a broad literature containing ethnographic descriptions of language shift and reclamation that emphasizes youth generational perspectives to varying degrees, such as Nancy Dorian’s work on the East Sutherland Gaelic community’s shift from their unique dialect of Gaelic to English (1981); Daniel Suslak’s work on Mixe-Spanish bilingual youth in the Totontepec community in Mexico (2005); Annette Schimdt’s work on “young peoples’ Dyirbal” in the Jambun community in Australia (1985); Don Kulick’s work on the shift in Gapun Village in Papua New Guinea from Taiap to Tok Pisin (1992); Miki Makihara’s work on Rapa

Nui children's speech (2005); and Lucy Tse's work on bilinguals/biliterates of immigrant background in the United States (2001).² In Aotearoa in particular, there is a growing body of literature written by and/or about graduates of *kōhanga reo* and *kura kaupapa Māori*, focusing on their post-immersion school experiences (Martin 2012; Tocker 2007, 2012). Conferences such as the 21st Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium (SILS), held in Hilo, Hawai'i, in January 2014, feature panels of young heritage learners—high school and college students—who discuss their experiences, challenges, and successes in reclaiming their ancestral/heritage languages.

This dialogue piece is a contribution to this growing literature. Through the use of illustrative vignettes based on ethnographic observation and one-on-one conversations, I explore matters of language reclamation as connected to personal identity. I draw on three “pools” of youth experiences: (1) young adults from diasporic Mortlockese communities; (2) members of my cohort at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) from various language backgrounds; and (3) my personal experiences as a member of a diasporic Filipino community. Whereas I explore the first two “pools” in separate sections of this essay, I draw on the third one throughout, interweaving my own autoethnographic accounts into the descriptions of my cohorts' experiences as a way of contextualizing my experiences with theirs (regarding autoethnography, see Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011).

I also emphasize that the examples I draw on here are primarily from diasporic contexts in which most (but not all) of the languages are relatively vibrant in the homeland (eg, in terms of the strength of intergenerational transmission of language from parental to child generation). Leanne Hinton underscored that while “many people of immigrant descent who do not know their language of heritage manage to learn that language through classes or during visits to the homeland,”³ people who are identified (or who self-identify, or both) as indigenous minorities rarely have “anywhere to go to learn their ancestral tongue” (2001, 3). Nevertheless, as I argue in Odango forthcoming a, the experiences of language loss and reclamation—the struggles for identity formation—as experienced by a youth in the diaspora are just as important as those of a youth in the homeland. For example, Wyman, McCarty, and Nicholas observe that “the experiences of youth from Indigenous and immigrant communities in North America share certain similarities,” such as negotiating the dynamic linguascapes of movement, identity formation,

language competencies, and peer culture (2014, 5). Continuing to share research from these different contexts, especially success stories, is important and fruitful.⁴

In the vein of writers such as Kirsten McGavin (2014) and Ty Kāwika Tengan and his coauthors (2010), I acknowledge my ancestry as an intrinsic part of my research, both on a broad level and for this particular dialogue piece. My mother's family is from the Ilokano-speaking areas of Pangasinan in Luzon in the northern Philippines, and my father's from the Kinaray-a- and Cebuano-speaking areas of Bukidnon in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. I was born in 1983 in the United States and raised in a Tagalog-speaking home since Tagalog is the lingua franca for both my immediate and extended family. I am a receptive bilingual (Beardsmore 1986, 120), in that Tagalog is my first language (L1) of comprehension but I experienced a shift to English as my dominant language of communication early in my childhood. I am a heritage learner of Tagalog (Valdés 2005), and my most important teachers are my family. As I discuss elsewhere (Odango forthcoming b), I am an Austronesian person who finds value in the pan-ethnic label of "Austronesian" as an identity that allows me to contextualize my experiences as a diasporic Filipino with other Austronesians in my generational cohort, especially with regard to language and identity. Underscoring my discussion of the identity labels I choose to evoke here is the realization that "identity"—at least from the sociocultural perspective—"is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 588). I am not "Filipino" or "Austronesian" or a "heritage learner of Tagalog" by default; rather, such identities are continuously co-constructed through my daily interactions with other people.

I have chosen the examples in this essay for two reasons that are intrinsically tied to inspiration: (1) I discuss examples of language reclamation and maintenance by members of my generational cohort (in diasporic contexts) as a means of somewhat combating the overwhelmingly pessimistic and fatalistic nature of discourses about language shift and endangerment; and (2) all of the examples I have chosen are those in which the language in question is an Austronesian language, thus further developing my own exploration of Austronesian pan-ethnic identity as a source of inspiration in this lifelong journey of reversing language shift (see Odango forthcoming b).

AGENCY IN RECLAMATION: AN EXAMPLE FROM SATOWAN ISLET

The first story I share focuses on heritage language reclamation for reasons that are connected to the family domain. This is the experience of Karnim Judah, a member of my generational cohort who was an undergraduate student at UH Mānoa.⁵ Karnim's parents are both originally from Satowan Islet, one of the inhabited islets of Satowan Atoll, the southernmost atoll of the Mortlocks (see Bautista 2010 for ethnographic descriptions of Satowan Islet). The Mortlocks are a chain of low islands situated to the southeast of Chuuk Lagoon (Chuuk State, Federated States of Micronesia). The residents of the Mortlocks speak Mortlockese, a language that is best represented as an array of at least eleven different yet mutually intelligible regional dialects corresponding to the eleven inhabited municipalities/islands of the Mortlocks (Odango 2013, 208–209). There are an estimated seven thousand speakers of Mortlockese in the Mortlocks, and a few thousand more in diasporic communities throughout the Pacific and around the world. Karnim's parents are speakers of the Satowan dialect of Mortlockese as spoken on Satowan Islet.

Karnim's early life story is similar to that of many immigrant children, including those whose families are from the Federated States of Micronesia. Her father moved to the United States in the 1960s and her mother in the 1980s. Karnim was born in 1983 in the United States, and she has one other sibling, also born in the United States. The language of interaction that her parents used with her and her sibling was English since that is the language of their new home; her parents, however, continued to use Satowan Mortlockese when they spoke to each other. In an interview I conducted with Karnim in March 2012—part of the development of a pilot study on language attitudes in bi/multilingual Mortlockese communities—I asked Karnim the following question: “Why do you think they were still able to continue using Mortlockese between themselves, even though they were living in America?” Karnim's reply—code-switched between Satowan Mortlockese and English—was as follows:⁶

*Mm . . . má reen pwúkún ngaang,
áái lúkú pwe
inei, ewar mi kile kapasen Méríka
ngé—
aar repé kapasen Méríka leefüileer,*

*Mm . . . well as for me, I believe
that
my mother, of course she knows
English but—
for them to speak English between
them,*

<i>resé pwal—they would rather speak</i>	they don't—they would rather speak
<i>Mortlockese in between, iwe aar</i>	Mortlockese in between, and so for
<i>má</i>	them
<i>kapas nganei áámam mé</i>	to speak to us my brother and me,
<i>mwongeiei we,</i>	
<i>áámam mááritá, kapasen Méríka.</i>	during our childhood, English.

Karnim's account reflects what countless other immigrant families—including my own—continue to experience: the language of interaction between the parents is the language of the homeland, whereas the language of interaction between the parents and the children is the language of the new land. Note that such a situation also occurs in home island contexts, in which children are spoken to in the majority lingua franca of the larger community while adults continue to speak the minority local community language among themselves.

It is striking to point out that Karnim's reply was predominantly in Satowan Mortlockese. In the course of this interview with her—which I conducted in both English and Mortlockese—I learned that, as a young child, she was a receptive bilingual in Satowan Mortlockese, and English was her dominant language of interaction. It was not until she was a teenager that she developed fluency in speaking her heritage language, which she explained as follows (this comment immediately followed the previous one):

<i>Ngé lúpwan shak iaa pwalán</i>	But the time when I had just started
<i>pwopwutá</i>	
<i>le kapasen Mwoshulók leefilam</i>	to speak Mortlockese among us all,
<i>mwoonson,</i>	
<i>atoon áái cousin kewe re aitto no</i>	it was the time my cousins came
	to stay
<i>reemam, iwe iaa pwal má kaié.</i>	with us, and so I also practiced.

Karnim was fourteen years old when her first cousin from the Mortlocks came to live with her family. Later in our interview, she explicated her experience:

<i>Iwe rúwaman áái cousin, reké ittá</i>	So two of my cousins, they came up
<i>nonno</i>	to stay
<i>reemam. Eman . . . má mi pwal</i>	with us. One of them . . . indeed
<i>kúle kapasen</i>	also knows
<i>Méríka, mi kile kapasen</i>	English, and knows Mortlockese,
<i>Mwoshulók,</i>	

*ewe eman, mi shak ekis shak aan
kile
kapasen Méríka ngé e lap má aan
kapasen Mwoshulók.
Mé . . . áám kapas mé leefiúlámam,
it was
more of a comfort zone aipé . . .
kapasen
Mwoshulók,
just to adjust to . . . them.
Iwe—áám má kapasen Mwoshulók,
it was like
an everyday—it was like practice,
it was like—
--
Áái má—pwúkin má áái mwéshan
ipé kile
ossen kapasen—ipé fluent en

kapasen fanéúei,
--
it was—it gave me practice áái ipé
má
kúle kapasen fanéúei.

Mi pwal má—Ipe pwal ausheanei
pwe ipé kúle,
ipé nonno kei ngé
pwal kúle kapasen Mwoshulók.*

and as for the other, just a little
bit of
English but mostly spoke
Mortlockese.
And . . . when we speak to each
other, it was
more of a comfort zone for us to . . .
speak
Mortlockese,
just to adjust to . . . them.
And so—us speaking Mortlockese,
it was like
an everyday—it was like practice,
it was like—
--
For me—my own desire for me
to know
the true language—me being fluent
in the
language of my island,
--
it was—it gave me practice for me
to be able to
know how to speak the language
of my island.
It was also—I'll also value it because
I know how (to speak it),
I'm staying here (in Hawai'i) but
I will also know how to speak
Mortlockese.

Because of circumstances largely beyond her control as a teenager—being in the constant company of family members whose primary mode of communication was Satowan Mortlockese—Karnim had opportunities to engage in constant meaningful interaction with members of her generational cohort in her heritage language. Karnim reported that before the first cousin came to stay with her family, she spoke very little Satowan Mortlockese; her cousin's extended stay was the beginning of the time when she “really started to polish and put [her] native tongue to practice” (pers comm, 2014). Karnim maintained her ability to speak Satowan Mortlockese as she grew older, speaking to her family members in that

code rather than in English, much to their surprise, especially for family members who had not seen or spoken to her since she was a child.

Karnim noted that “it was unexpected for a child being raised outside [of the homeland] to speak his/her native tongue fluently,” which is why “many were caught off guard when [her] exchanges were rather adequate to be considered fluent” (pers comm, 2014). Karnim recalled an anecdote in which a cousin made a long-distance phone call to her family in Hawai‘i. This cousin had last seen Karnim when she was a child; when he spoke with her on the phone, “he was taken aback that [she] not only knew the language” but also spoke it fluently (pers comm, 2014). Karnim reported that his response was, “Karnim ellet wamin far ngingin Satowan”; although a literal translation would be “Karnim, really and truly you sound like a Satowan person,” Karnim said that the actual interpretation was, “When did you learn the language and how were you able to speak it with fluency?” (pers comm, 2014).

Toward the end of the preceding excerpt, we see glimpses into Karnim’s linguistic identity. The phrase she used—*kapasen fanéúei* (the language of my island)—is the standard way of expressing the concept of “language” in Mortlockese (ie, the speech of one’s island). It is interesting, then, that before her sudden break in that phrase, she was about to say *ossen kapasen* (true language), since it implies that among the various codes to which she has access for communicating with others, it is Mortlockese that she identifies as her “true language.” She said *ipé pwal ausheanei* (I’ll also value it), which I infer from the context as referring to valuing Mortlockese; she explained that even though she is staying in Hawai‘i, she maintains the ability to *kúle kapasen Mwoshulók* (know how to speak Mortlockese). Mortlockese, then, provides a crucial part of Karnim’s linguistic identity while living away from her family’s homeland.

Assessing the degree to which a young adult maintains “agency” in reclaiming a heritage language and understanding for what reasons that happens are two empirical questions that are best answered through longitudinal ethnographic observation in the course of a person’s linguistic development (eg, through diary studies and interviews) rather than through momentary introspection on the part of the person who is identified as reclaiming the language. Alternatively, individuals like Karnim can engage in autoethnography, if that is in their research purview. Karnim’s experience shows how language attitudes are like seeds that grow and can strengthen over time. What began as a practical need to communicate with her cousins and family in the shared code of Mortlockese led to the devel-

opment of attitudes that she fosters as a young adult—that Mortlockese is a realization of the connection to her identity and her land. These ideologies thus give her motivation to maintain her fluency in the language of her parents, her family, and other Mortlockese-speaking members of her cohort.

As I discuss in *Odango* forthcoming a, I share Karnim’s experience in that while I acquired English as my dominant language of communication, as a teenager I was driven to reclaim the ability to speak Tagalog. At first, I was primarily motivated by academic interests: at the onset of my undergraduate studies in linguistics, I found it far more interesting to research a language other than the major world languages such as English, French, Japanese, and so forth. While Tagalog is by no means underrepresented in the linguistics literature, it was different enough from other languages that most people were researching. Later in my undergraduate studies, I found value in Tagalog not as a research language but as a means through which I could explore and define my Filipino identity. Whereas others in my cohort of first-generation US-born Filipinos embrace the Filipino-American (or “Fil-Am”)⁷ identity in a variety of ways not inherently connected to the ability to speak a Filipino language fluently—or at least the attempt to do so—I found that language was the most important way for me to remain connected to my family, my culture, and my homeland.

Karnim was the first person I had met in my UHM cohort who shared with me a story so similar to my own: the desire to reclaim our ability to speak our heritage languages as teenagers. Karnim is a fluent speaker of Satowan Mortlockese, as much as I can surmise by comparing her speech to that of LI speakers in the Federated States of Micronesia; Karnim is also a fluent speaker of English.⁸ Her story is an example of additive bilingualism, which across generations is the acquisition of other languages without loss of the ability to speak the ancestral/heritage language. If she could be so successful at maintaining additive bilingualism, then so, too, can I and others. It is my wish to share Karnim’s story with other youth so that they can also realize that their experiences are similar to ours. Such realizations can lead to the reinforcement of positive language attitudes that continue throughout adulthood, attitudes that are then shared with other members in a person’s cohort through everyday interactional discourse—that is, daily identity work, from the sociolinguistic perspective. In the midst of overwhelmingly negative discourse about the “inevitable” effects of language shift, it is important to remind young readers that singular desire can lead to meaningful action that inspires other people in

similar scenarios—fellow youth who share aspirations to reclaim what is meaningful to them. For a person to know that she or he is not alone in her or his experiences with the heritage language is positive encouragement to keep moving forward, regardless of the challenges that remain ahead.

In the course of our interview, Karnim and I talked about the shared experiences of being in a restaurant with our families while growing up in the United States: as children we told our parents to talk more quietly when they were speaking in the family language, lest the other people around us hear us speaking something “weird.” When a child reaches that age when being embarrassed by her or his parents is a constant concern, nothing is more embarrassing than being the “other” associated with a foreign language. At some point, though, most teenagers and young adults adopt some variation of the theme of “being different is cool,” and what, then, could be more explicitly different to a bystander than hearing a foreign language? At some point, the youth start telling their parents to talk more loudly in the restaurant, to make their “otherness”—their “coolness”—known to everyone else; they become proud of being different.

YOUTH AND PARENTHOOD: AN EXAMPLE FROM PAKIN ATOLL

The next example focuses on the decisions that young people make regarding parenthood and the effects on language in their community, in the context of Pakin Atoll. Pakin is an outer island of Pohnpei State in the Federated States of Micronesia, located approximately twenty miles away from Pohnpei Island. The Pakin community is part of the diasporic community of speakers of Mortlockese who were relocated to Pohnpei over a century ago after a typhoon devastated the Mortlocks in 1907; a large number of them settled in Sokehs Municipality in Pohnpei (Spennemann 2007). Mortlockese is the L1 of almost all residents of Pakin, which is mostly represented by the Lukunosh and Satawan dialects;⁹ residents acquire Pohnpeian as their second language (L2) because it is the official language of Pohnpei State (see Odango 2013 for further background information on Pakin). My entry into linguistic fieldwork on Pakin started with my Peace Corps Volunteer service (2006–2009), during which I worked as a teacher in Pakin Elementary School. By virtue of not only living on a coral atoll where no one else was fluent in English—or in Tagalog, for that matter—but also the desire to make meaningful connections with my host family

and new friends, I gained fluency in Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese during my service. I began my linguistic fieldwork on the language in earnest in 2010, which continues to the present.

As a minority language that has no official status in Pohnpei State, the various communities of Mortlockese speakers (at least five distinct dialect groups) are notable in having maintained additive bilingualism between their unique dialects of Mortlockese and Pohnpeian for over a century, spanning at least five generations. The overwhelming majority of Mortlockese children are raised in Mortlockese as their L1, and through formal education and everyday interactions with Pohnpeians in their adolescent and adult lives, they gain fluency in Pohnpeian but not at the expense of Mortlockese. This is the case for other diasporic outer-island communities residing on Pohnpei, which includes residents whose ancestries originate from the atolls of Mwoakilloa, Pingelap, Kapingamarangi, and Nukuoro (Rehg 1998, 331). These outer-island children thus grow up in trilingual situations involving the language of their outer island (L1), Pohnpeian (L2), and English (third language [L3]), the last being the national language of the Federated States of Micronesia. It is remarkable, then, that massive language shift away from the less numerous (in terms of absolute number of speakers) outer-island languages to Pohnpeian and/or English has not already occurred in these diasporas. From my own observations, members of these diasporic communities are extremely proud of their linguistic heritages, evidenced in no small part by the persistent intergenerational transmission of their languages as well as their tacit support for additive bi/trilingualism.

I administered an early version of my language attitude pilot survey to a few people on Pakin in 2011. One member of the youth generation on Pakin whom I interviewed is a man whom I identify with the pseudonym “Petrus,” an L1 speaker of Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese. Born in 1975, Petrus is actually a member of at least two generational cohorts: (1) the adults on Pakin born in the 1960s (including most of his older siblings) who had children in the 1980s and 1990s, and (2) those children born in the 1980s. I ascertain his membership in two cohorts based on my observations of his interactions with both groups (eg, taking on responsibilities associated with both adults and youths); in light of Suslak’s call for researchers to take a critical look at how “age” and “generation” are defined (2005), I acknowledge that Petrus’s belonging to both categories is defined not by age but rather by the roles and responsibilities he chooses to take on as a member of the Pakin community. I have known Petrus ever

since the beginning of my Peace Corps service on Pakin, first as my language tutor for Mortlockese and later as my primary language consultant for my fieldwork on the language; above all, he is one of my closest friends in the community. Like other Pakin residents, he is fluent in Pohnpeian, but unlike most, he also has a high degree of fluency in English. Petrus has a young son who was born in 2007; through general observation (not through focused longitudinal study), I have been able to watch Petrus's interactions with his son, whom he raises in Mortlockese. My discussions with Petrus about the intergenerational transmission of language are therefore especially rich since he is a member of the youth generation on Pakin and yet faces the daily responsibilities of raising a child—and doing so before other members in his youth cohort.

For example, in discussions about subtractive bilingualism (a process by which, across generations, the younger generations acquire a majority language but do not gain or maintain the ability to speak the ancestral/heritage language), Petrus is quick to point out specific examples of his nieces and nephews in Sokehs who are raised by Mortlockese-speaking (L1) parents in Pohnpeian rather than Mortlockese; the result is that while these youths are fluent in Pohnpeian, they have only receptive bilingual skills in Mortlockese. What is most salient for Petrus, however, is their inability to speak fluent Mortlockese, and their attempts to do so are riddled with mistakes. In light of the calls I make in this dialogue piece for the integration of more youth perspectives into the global discourses of language shift and linguistic identity, I admit that this perspective from Petrus—whom I identify as a member of a particular subset of Mortlockese youth (ie, the Pakin youth) among the entire set of Mortlockese youth in Pohnpei State—about his nieces and nephews is indeed a perspective of a member of an older generation evaluating the speech of members of a younger generation. I have not yet had the opportunity to investigate matters of youth linguistic identity from the perspective of individuals such as Petrus's nieces and nephews and their cohort (ie, receptive bilinguals living on Pohnpei).

Petrus has discussed with me his ideological position regarding linguistic identity, as expressed in the metaphor *shshaan Mwoshulók* (blood of the Mortlocks): if someone is of Mortlockese blood, then that person is expected to be able to speak fluent Mortlockese. The thought of someone who is ethnically Mortlockese but who can only speak Pohnpeian is a challenge to the powerful ideologies of “language = ethnic identity” that many people share on Pakin—and around the world. In the same vein,

my existence as a US-born Filipino who fluently speaks Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese by virtue of Peace Corps service is also a challenge to that “language = ethnic identity” ideology.

One factor in the development of such an ideology in the Pakin and wider Sokehs communities of Mortlockese people is the fact that examples like the receptive bilingualism of Petrus’s nieces and nephews are relatively uncommon occurrences. Based on my personal experience over the past eight years, the overwhelming majority of Pakin- and Sokehs-born Mortlockese people maintain additive bilingualism. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of US-born Filipino children experience subtractive bilingualism and become receptive bilinguals whose dominant language is English. While Petrus might reject the possibility that it is okay for someone to be born of Mortlockese parents yet only fluently speak Pohnpeian, I am more willing to accept that someone can be born of Filipino parents yet only fluently speak English.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Petrus’s stance also reveals positive language attitudes toward the Mortlockese language as a primary code of interaction among Mortlockese people that should be maintained (additive bilingualism) rather than abandoned in favor of only speaking Pohnpeian (subtractive bilingualism).

Some of the most enlightening aspects of my conversations with Petrus in the context of the pilot survey I administered during my 2011 field trip to Pakin are the meta-level discussions we co-constructed about the value of asking such questions about language use, language attitudes, multilingualism, and the intergenerational transmission of language. Even though such topics often arise in everyday conversations in arguably every speech community around the world, I specifically elicited responses from the pilot survey participants, asking them to reflect on why I would ask questions such as, “One day in the future, when your children are married and have children of their own, which language would you want them to teach to their children: Mortlockese or Pohnpeian or both?” The following is an excerpt of that kind of conversation I had with Petrus (the initial “E” represents “Emerson,” and “P” represents “Petrus”):

E: *Mé reemw, are mefiomw, meet
lomwotan iáái kapas aiek kééi.
Iáái project ie.*

--

*Pwata ngaang iké mwashan . . .
iááneí kapas aiek sokkon kééi?*

For you, or in your opinion, what is
the usefulness of my questions here?
This project of mine?

--

Why do you think I wanted . . .
to ask these kinds of questions?

- P: *Mé reei?* For me?
- E: *Mm.* Mm hm.
- P: *Ké ausheanei pwe . . . eké ffér* It's valued because . . . it creates—
nganei—
wen eké—ashama nganeái pwe in other words it—reminds me that
ipé— I—
akiaki pwe mi aushea kapsen should think that Mortlockese is
Mwoshulók. important,
- E: *Mm.* Mm hm.
- P: *pwe mi to eeu ráán eeu ráán,* because it's possible that one day
epé salengela. in the future
it will be completely lost.
- E: *Ewar.* Yes.

Petrus's realization that Mortlockese might be *salengela* (completely lost) one day is in the local context of the Pakin and Sokehs communities, not in a global sense (ie, the extinction of Mortlockese). Without using the term “intergenerational language shift,” he and I had previously discussed a scenario in which children who are born of Mortlockese parents but only speak Pohnpeian eventually become parents themselves, and, depending on factors such as whom they marry and where they raise their children, it is possible that the next generation of children might also be raised only speaking Pohnpeian, and so forth. Petrus and I tacitly understand that Mortlockese continues to be spoken as an L1 in the Mortlocks by thousands of other people, so Mortlockese as a whole is not in danger of being completely gone. Nevertheless, the thought that Mortlockese might one day not be spoken by people whose ancestors have been speaking it for over five generations while living in Pohnpei State is particularly sobering, especially for someone like Petrus who maintains strong ideological ties to language and identity.

I might venture to say that Petrus had not previously come to the realization about the scenario of language shift prior to our conversation, but we were able to “connect the dots” in the context of understanding the changes that happen across *mwééú* (generations). One salient example that came up in our discussion about such intergenerational changes is the development of the velarization (vowel “darkening”) and gemination (consonant lengthening) traits that characterize the speech of young Pakin children, including Petrus's own son. Such phonological traits are

so striking that adults often comment on it in metalinguistic reflection about Pakin speech in general (sometimes without my direct questioning of the matter), and they trace the origin of such innovations to a subset of children who were born in the 1980s and raised on Pakin. Petrus is able to understand those linguistic phenomena as having developed and been transmitted intergenerationally—what was not there in previous generations is now there in current generations. This understanding that change happens naturally across generations facilitated our discussions about “loss” in the context of intergenerational language shift: what was always there (fluent Mortlockese speakers who become bilingual in Pohnpeian) might not be there in the current generations (receptive bilinguals who only understand Mortlockese and speak Pohnpeian) and future generations (ethnic Mortlockese who can only speak Pohnpeian).

Because Petrus’s and my conversation was entirely in Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese, I never used English phrases like “intergenerational transmission,” “language shift,” “language loss,” or “language endangerment” in discussing these matters with him; note, then, that Petrus’s use of the word *salengela* (completely lost)—composed of *saleng* (lost) and the directional suffix *-la*, which denotes not only physical movement away from the speaker but also the metaphorical concept of “to completion”¹¹—parallels the way “loss” is used in the English-language discourses on language shift. Similarly, negative connotations accompany words like *salengela*—it is not good that what was once there is now completely lost. The loss of language can lead to the loss of culture and drastic changes in the way of life for a Mortlockese person, changes that are not perceived to be positive.

Petrus’s son began Grade 1 in Pakin Elementary School in the fall of 2012, thus marking the beginning of his receiving regular formal input in Pohnpeian. To my knowledge and based on direct observation, most if not all of Petrus’s son’s interactions with his family and cohort on Pakin are in Mortlockese, with perhaps Pohnpeian used outside of the school building to reinforce class lessons (eg, homework in Pohnpeian). And during my most recent fieldtrip to Pakin in the summer of 2014, Petrus confirmed that he only speaks to his son in Mortlockese. Even though Petrus knows that some children on Pakin are raised speaking Pohnpeian for what I imagine are tacitly understood reasons among parents (ie, early proficiency in Pohnpeian is a benefit for the child), he chooses to raise his own son in his L1—the L1 of the wider Pakin community—knowing full well that he must also support his son’s learning of Pohnpeian as an L2 in

order to be a functioning member of Pohnpeian society; Petrus has overtly acknowledged such realizations to me on various occasions, and I tacitly infer them on others.

The degree to which Petrus's choices and motivations reflect other parents' perspectives on Pakin is a matter I must reserve for future study. Similarly, whether the language continues to be spoken by their future children and grandchildren who will make up the next generations remains to be seen. Language shift can be sudden, happening within just one generation, and the subsequent efforts to rebuild naturalistic intergenerational transmission can take several generations. The authors of the 2011 government-sponsored review on the state of *te reo Māori* and the strategies for supporting the intergenerational transmission of that language shared the following *whakataukī* (proverb): “E tata tapahi, e roa te whakatū” (It is quick to cut down, but it takes a long time to stand it up again). Drawing on the metaphor of the house, they elucidated that “the time taken to demolish it is significantly less than the time and effort required to build it again” (Te Paepae Motuhake 2011, 41). A person's recognition, however, that shift is a possibility (eg, Petrus's realizations in the course of our discussions) might be a factor in stemming the tide of language shift. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such global-level awareness of discourses of “loss” can affect the local-level interactions embedded in everyday conversation (eg, choosing to speak to the child more in the family language in light of knowledge about local and global language shift).

To return to the matter of “what to do about voluntary language shift” (Otsuka 2007, 449), raising awareness by having the kinds of conversations I describe with Petrus and asking pointed questions that otherwise might go unasked is one strategy that an academic might take, to the extent at least that the academic is willing to actively engage in such conversations because she or he takes a stance to “do something” about the shift that she or he observes (or postulates might occur). I can honestly say, though, that I would be disheartened to see Petrus's son grow up and experience some kind of language attrition in Mortlockese because he chooses to speak more Pohnpeian as a young adult, or chooses to marry a Pohnpeian person and decides to raise his children in Pohnpeian rather than Mortlockese. And at the same time, I acknowledge that my disheartenment could be his joy if he, for example, were to fall in love with someone in the medium of Pohnpeian, or they were happy in raising their children by speaking to them only in Pohnpeian. It ultimately does

not matter what I feel—both as a person who has seen him grow up and as a linguist—about his linguistic choices in his life, regardless of whether one day I happen to have a conversation with him similar to the one I had with Petrus.

It might be difficult for professional academics or community language advocates to continually admit this, but it bears repeating: languages are not living things that exist by themselves, for they only “live” in the people who speak them. The respect we have for each other as people—regardless of the status of endangerment of the languages we speak—should never be forgotten. I do not take a stance of defeatism, however, because it is an individual’s prerogative as to whether she or he engages with others in conversations about, for example, understanding the long-term consequences of the choices they make now for their children, or how one would practically promote additive bilingualism in the home (see Hinton 2013). And regardless of whether such conversations take place in a work or research context or as everyday talk, one must be prepared for the realization that some people are comfortable even if they cannot speak the ancestral/heritage/family/minority/endangered Language X and are only proficient in majority Language Y.

While wearing the “documentary linguist hat,” I admittedly find it difficult to assess that “comfort”; while wearing the “community member” hat, however, I know that a person’s “comfort” can change over time, and as a member of a particular Filipino diaspora, it is my prerogative to be a part of that change or not, for example, by having conversations with my family and cohort about what it means to be a Filipino who cannot speak a Philippine language. When we as academics engage with young people in particular—who are either our interlocutors (students we teach or advise) in conversations about language shift and linguistic identity, or “overhearers” as members of the wider audience on these global discourses—about topics that are deeply personal to them, what does it mean in practice to “respect” their perspectives? Rather than cite from the extensive literature about educational ethics, pedagogy, self-esteem, and youth mentorship, I would rather leave the question open-ended, as I expect that different readers will have different responses.

OTHER EXAMPLES FROM MY UHM COHORT

The realization that other Austronesians like me are engaged in journeys of language reclamation and maintenance first emerged out of my interac-

tions with speakers of Mortlockese like Karnim and Petrus. It left a lasting impression on me as a young diasporic Filipino to see that diasporic Mortlockese youth are thinking about the same matters that often weigh heavily on my mind. This Austronesian youth perspective developed as I shared these stories with other members of my UHM cohort and learned more about their stories. I provide two brief examples here.

The first is from a former classmate, Apay (Ai-yu) Tang, who is an LI speaker of Truku, an indigenous Formosan language of Taiwan. Although the approximate number of Truku speakers worldwide is twenty-four thousand, only the parental generation and up speak the language fluently, categorizing it as a “definitely endangered language” (Tang 2011, 2). I learned much about Apay’s efforts to diagnose the linguistic situation of her LI during a seminar project we completed in 2010 (later presented as Odango 2012). I was intrigued by her use of medical metaphors in discussing the challenges and solutions regarding language shift and language attrition. Apay had experience as a nurse in an intensive care unit prior to her graduate studies in linguistics (Tang 2011, 4). Her perspective is that efforts in developing a solution to the language-shift problem must be preceded by careful diagnosis; such diagnostic tools include psycholinguistic assessments of language shift and LI proficiency (Tang 2011). Apay’s reflections on the change in her perspective about her heritage language speak volumes about the effects that self-realizations can have on a person’s motivation to take action:

Growing up as a Truku Seediq in the multilingual and multicultural context of Taiwan, I have felt ambivalent about my ethnolinguistic identity. I take speaking Truku as a marker of group membership. However, to have access to “better” socio-economic and educational opportunities, I feel obliged to invest in learning and speaking both Mandarin and English. I maintain Truku ethnolinguistic identity by speaking to some of my family members and senior community members; yet I construct new multilingual identities through using Mandarin and English for survival purposes. It was not until my participation in the Language Documentation Training Center that my appreciation toward my mother tongue began to grow rapidly, and I seriously started to think about the meaning of language identity as well as how it relates to an individual and ethnicity. Language is more than a mere communicative tool. It is a marker of one’s individual and social identity and it affects one’s self-perception and self-esteem. (2011, 3)

The Language Documentation Training Center (LDTC) is a student-run project at UH Mānoa that trains LI speakers of minority and/or under-described languages in the basics of language documentation (see Ajo and

others 2010). Over the course of the training, many of the participants who have no previous background in linguistics often develop strong interests in the field as well as a desire to engage in language documentation, maintenance, and revitalization efforts in their own communities. I had the pleasure of working with Apay as an LDTC codirector during the spring 2010 semester. In all my interactions with Apay during our overlapping time at UH Mānoa, what was most inspiring to me was witnessing firsthand the efforts of a classmate—a member of a youth generation who is maintaining additive *trilingualism* in Truku, Mandarin, and English—in holding on to her L1 in spite of overwhelming language shift among members of her cohort from Truku to Mandarin, as well as her desire to share the spark of linguistic discovery with others through the training center. Even after her graduation from UH Mānoa and her return to Taiwan, I continue to be inspired by Apay’s ongoing work with her local community.¹²

The second example is taken from a conversation I had with another member of my generational cohort who was an undergraduate student at UH Mānoa; I identify him with the pseudonym “Manasa.” Manasa was born in Fiji in 1990 to Fijian parents, but he was raised primarily speaking English. He and I interacted at various times while at UH Mānoa. On 3 May 2013, we shared a particularly interesting conversation in which topics related to language shift and linguistic identity emerged. Despite my academic motivations for discussing such topics with members of my cohort, the conversation between Manasa and myself was just talk between friends over coffee, a “one last chat” before the end of the semester and our parting of ways, as Manasa was about to graduate and return to Fiji.

Our discussion was rich in shared realizations between a young Fijian who extensively studied *‘ōlelo Hawai‘i* (the speech of Hawai‘i, ie, Hawaiian) while attending UH Mānoa and a young Filipino who had been immersed in a Mortlockese world for over two years. Manasa expressed that he had a better appreciation of the value of his Fijian identity through *na vosa vakaViti* (Fijian language) because of his time studying and speaking *‘ōlelo Hawai‘i*, and I shared with him my parallel sentiments about developing a deeper appreciation of my Filipino identity through Tagalog because of my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer speaking Mortlockese. Furthermore, we both share the earnest desire to hold on to our heritage languages in spite of the English-dominated contexts around us, including in our own families.

Toward the end of our lengthy conversation, Manasa and I talked

about what kinds of actions could be taken to address the shifts we see in our generations, especially regarding conversations we would have with parents—both our parental generation and the new parents of our generational cohort. The following is an excerpt from the point in our conversation in which I discuss my perspective on “choice,” specifically, on giving a young person the choice between being monolingual in the majority language by “default” or trying to gain or maintain additive bilingualism (the initial “M” represents “Manasa”):¹³

M: So I think, what you’re saying like uh . . . like giving the choice, . . . I would actually force them with the language. If they really didn’t want it, they would pull out. That’s giving them the choice. But if you give them like a choice in the beginning, a lot of them will just sort of just,

E: That’s a good point man.

M: you know, . . .

E: /Yeah it’s, yeah but—/they’ll come up with some kind of excuse, right, it’s very easy to—

M: [It’s very]

E: [you’re right.]

M: easy to pull out.

E: It’s very easy to pull out at the beginning.

M: But if you force it, . . . if they really didn’t want it, they would pull out of it.

E: Yeah.

M: Like they would say, /no I don’t want to learn . . . Filipino/ . . . but, like they would never know what it feels like to speak the language, to have the deep connection if they don’t actually, have that first time deep connection. They need to have that—they need to know what it feels like, to be like, /oh my gosh, this is why I want to speak my language./

E: Yeah.

M: But if you tell them like . . . if you tell them like theoretically, X plus Y equals Z, they’re gonna be like, {alveolar click} /I don’t know about that Z,/ but if they actually experience what Z is, [they’ll be like,]

E: [Yeah.]

M: /oh,

E: There you go. There you go.

M: this is why I want to speak my language./

In the context of our larger conversation, the matter of “force” that Manasa discussed here referred to teaching the ancestral/heritage language as a practical means of communication because of other non-linguistic circumstances, such as someone moving back to the homeland or parents enacting a language policy in the home. Manasa was not suggesting that language be “forced” on children, teenagers, or young adults against their will in scenarios in which more linguistic “agency” is expected (eg, the workplace, school, and other public domains), as opposed to, for example, the home, where youth have relatively less say about what elders choose to do (or demand) with language—a perception that nevertheless can be challenged and renegotiated by members of that household.

I agree with Manasa; after the last line in the above excerpt, I shared with him my perspective about learning Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese, a language I was “forced” to learn, given the professional expectations required of me as a Peace Corps Volunteer living on an outer island, as well as the community expectations of me as their long-term guest. Through this forced learning of Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese, I gained an appreciation of the language as first and foremost a mode of communication I use with my host family, friends, and colleagues who speak the language, and only secondarily do I see it as a “research language” of value to linguistics.

Manasa’s mathematical metaphor is quite persuasive: someone might logically explain to you that you “should” learn the “Language” because “X plus Y equals Z”; for example “X” = “you attempt to learn Tagalog as a heritage language”; “Y” = “Tagalog is the language of your ancestors”; and “Z” = “by speaking Tagalog, you become closer to your ancestral heritage, and therefore you become a ‘better’ or ‘more enriched’ person in doing so.” However, you can easily rationalize the “Z” component in any number of ways in order to get out of putting in the time and effort to learn the language: “It’s too much work,” or “I have better and more interesting things to do with my time,” or “I would rather learn a different language that will help me in my career,” and so forth. Michele K Johnson (Sʔímlaʔxʷ)—a postdoctoral researcher in Indigenous language revitalization at Simon Fraser University—shared with me an anecdote about the challenges of encouraging children and teenagers to decide to learn their ancestral/heritage languages. Among her cohort of learners in a Nʔsyilxcn immersion experience in Okanagan, British Columbia, was a seventeen-year-old girl. Johnson recalled that “it was very difficult to motivate her to do homework or study” (pers comm, 2014). An important factor affecting language learning for teenagers is the high affective filter associated with

negative emotions such as anxiety, embarrassment, and self-doubt, which can be obstacles to language learning (compare Krashen 2003). Michele remarked that despite the challenges, the teenager “learned a lot in the house” (pers comm, 2014).

Notwithstanding various academics’ exuberant calls for young people to reclaim their heritage languages or for parents to choose additive bilingualism as a household language policy, one must realize that there is an immense amount of time, effort, energy, and spirit that an individual has to invest in order to achieve such goals (see, eg, Johnson 2013). Te Raukura Roa, who is a member of the first cohort to graduate from *kōhanga reo*, emphasized to me that it takes an entire community to support children going through an immersion school process, realized as physical effort, time, gas, money, and emotional investment—in other words, real sacrifice (pers comm, 2014). As Manasa explained, by creating from the beginning the opportunity for youth to link identity and language—that is, through the “forcible” teaching of the language from an early age—as they grow up, children will most likely develop a “first time deep connection” and then be able to independently develop their own senses of “oh my gosh, this is why I want to speak my language”—a realization that is at its core emotional rather than logical.

A recent discussion I had with Dalton-Blake Keanu Beauprez—a former student of mine who is of *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiian) descent—underscored this point: he chooses to reclaim his Hawaiian heritage by learning how to speak ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i through language courses at UH Mānoa and by practicing *mālama ‘āina* (caring for the land) through hands-on experience (pers comm, 2014). He is genuinely happy that he is able to speak with his grandmother in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, something that no one else in his family is able to do. This point bears repeated emphasis: it is one thing for someone to explain to a youth why she or he “should” speak the ancestral/heritage language; it is another thing for that young person to make that realization on her or his own. And one must never forget that even if a person does reject the ancestral/heritage language, or otherwise chooses to define her or himself as a person apart from that language, then that is a choice that must be respected—a choice that can also change over time. I also fully acknowledge that such choices have consequences and create challenges, such as immediate reactions from the parental generation or the possible reactions from future generations (see, eg, Dorian’s account that East Sutherland youth who do not speak

Gaelic berated their elders for not having transmitted the ancestral language [1993, 576]).¹⁴

The common thread among both of these examples is that realization through some kind of external catalyst can lead to positive changes toward language reclamation. Apay found a renewed sense of identity through her participation in the Language Documentation Training Center. Manasa expressed gaining a better understanding of the possibility of language shift happening for Fijian youth because of his study of *‘ōlelo Hawai‘i* and the colonial history of its speakers; he even professed to speaking more Fijian while he was in Hawai‘i than when he was previously in Fiji, primarily because he was able to practice speaking with other Fijian students whose fluency levels were similar to his. My own sense of Filipino identity as realized through Tagalog has deepened—and my efforts to continue developing my Tagalog language skills have been reinforced—because of my experiences in the Peace Corps and discussions with members of my generational cohort at UH Mānoa.¹⁵

AUSTRONESIAN INSPIRATION

I choose to focus on Austronesian perspectives in this essay partly because the bulk of my experiences with my generational cohort has been with speakers of Austronesian languages, a consequence of the geographic contexts I have encountered thus far in my life: growing up in a Filipino diaspora in the United States, serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Federated States of Micronesia, and attending UH Mānoa in Hawai‘i. There is a long academic tradition of investigating Austronesia as an areal object of study in the social sciences, especially in linguistics (Blust 2013) and anthropology (Bellwood, Fox, and Tryon 1995); there is also precedent for solutions-based study, such as Anthony P S Guerrero and his coauthors’ 2013 review of mental health in Austronesia. They observed that “Austronesian-speaking peoples have unfortunately commonly experienced oppressive colonization, genocide, indigenous language extinction, war, and poverty” (Guerrero and others 2013, 15). While the authors “acknowledge the challenge in describing common and unifying themes across such a diverse population . . . [they] maintain that, given the seafaring nature and long-distance cultural connectivity of this population, there is at least as much basis for inclusively reviewing the Austronesian-speaking people as there is for reviewing groups of nations whose only

commonality may be adjacent physical space on a continent” (Guerrero and others 2013, 15).

Guerrero has also pointed out to me that given the shared cultural histories and traditions of Austronesian-speaking peoples, there may well be shared solutions to challenges in areas of mental and social health (pers comm, 2014). Such a pan-ethnic approach raises several questions: Should language retention and shift (ie, additive and subtractive bilingualism) be regularly assessed and/or investigated further as a marker of one of four modes of cultural interface (assimilation, marginalization, separation, vs integration), and/or as a correlate of other measures of psychological and educational well-being? What are the contexts in which promoting native language fluency can bolster psychosocial and educational protective factors? Should youth programs also actively promote linguistic or cultural connectedness and communication with parents and other relatives? These kinds of questions have been raised in other work focusing on Filipino youth experiences in Hawai‘i, particularly in contexts of low cultural identification as one of several risk factors for delinquent behavior (Guerrero and others 2010), whereby the retention of the native language is hypothesized to be a protective factor against issues such as anxiety and depression (Guerrero and others 2006).

I also admit that I gain a sense of personal solidarity with my cohort in researching and sharing their experiences. I find support not only in the fact that we share similar experiences in the formation of our linguistic identities but also in my realization that we are connected by language and culture to a shared Austronesian ancestry. I am not alone in my efforts for heritage language reclamation because I know that I have ties to my generational cohort who are making similar efforts, ties that are defined not just by blood or academic affiliation or relationships borne from volunteer service but also by a deeper pan-ethnic connection that crosses great spans of time and place—they are in a sense part of my extended Austronesian family. And as Robert Blust—a renowned scholar on the Austronesian language family—has reminded me, it is something in which I should take pride, not just as an academic who studies Austronesian languages like Tagalog and Mortlockese, but as an Austronesian person (pers comm, 2014). I am motivated to strive toward my own personal goals of language reclamation because I know that other Austronesians like me are doing the same. Language reclamation and maintenance for me is a matter of holding on to my Filipino identity and learning more about my Austronesian identity.

As I discuss at length in Odango forthcoming b, evoking an “Austronesian” pan-ethnic identity raises its own issues, especially since “panethnic labels may seem intuitive to social scientists who use them, but they are often not accepted by ethnic group members” (Kao and Joyner 2006, 975). In Odango forthcoming b, I draw parallels to McGavin’s discussion of how the label of “Nesian” is “predicated on the [pan-ethnic] qualities of the label ‘Islander’ . . . [and] is emerging in online forums and social networking sites to denote a person of Islander descent” (McGavin 2014, 126–127). She found that the “Nesian” identity is a conceptualization of “unity in diversity” and “justifies and constructs a [pan-ethnic] Islander identity especially valid within diasporic settings” (McGavin 2014, 142–143). I admit that while the term “Austronesian” may not immediately resonate with other people as a relevant everyday identity,¹⁶ by no means do I find that to be a deterrent to my own explorations of its value, especially regarding how it allows me to find connections with people as realized through shared linguistic ancestry.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

This dialogue piece is not just a recounting of my personal journey as a diasporic Filipino or an Austronesian in search of pan-ethnic identity. It is a scholarly call to all who study language shift (and loss, endangerment, maintenance, reclamation, and so forth) in all of its sociocultural contexts, regardless of where the language in question is spoken in the world or how many speakers remain: we cannot gain an adequate understanding of these phenomena if we assume “loss” to be inevitable or natural and if we ignore youth perspectives. This essay, then, is an attempt at addressing the assumptions of “loss” by emphasizing stories of reclamation, as well as addressing the dearth of youth perspectives by interweaving stories from members of my generational cohort with my own experiences.

I find the national proverb of the Philippines—*Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan, hindi makararating sa paroroonan* (One who does not know how to look back at where one came from, will not be able to reach the destination)—to be a clear reminder of my role as a language learner. The intergenerational transmission of language and culture is inherently tied to the triumvirate of “past, present, and future”: any attempt at ensuring that the knowledge, practices, and beliefs of our ancestors are passed on to future generations rests on how prepared we are for looking back toward whence we came, confronting the challenges that

we face now, and moving forward regardless of what lies ahead. For the youth in particular, the present challenges include asking ourselves why we did not want to learn the language from our elders—or why we did not ask them (or even force them) to teach us. Future challenges include evaluating the decisions we make now for our careers, personal lives, homes, and so forth, and understanding the effects those decisions might have on the perpetuation of our linguistic and cultural heritage.

I find great inspiration in being able to look back at my linguistic genealogy as an Austronesian person because it allows me to contextualize my experiences—a Filipino who was born and raised away from his family's homeland—with those of my generational cohort who come from places such as Taiwan, the Philippines, East Timor, Palau, the Mortlocks, Pohnpei, Kiribati, Fiji, Aotearoa, and Hawai'i. My experiences are not singular but rather form a part of a larger pattern with those of other young Austronesians who choose to reclaim and hold on to language for reasons that are deeply personal and often connected to identity in a variety of dimensions. This is a source of immeasurable motivation, especially considering that the journey of language reclamation and maintenance is never-ending. I encourage other young scholars—regardless of whether they have Austronesian ancestry—to continue writing about their own and other youth perspectives as a means of supporting each other in our efforts to journey forth. And for many of us, this means taking these conversations outside of academic contexts and into our own homes in the company of loved ones, in order to continue asking questions of what it means to reclaim and hold on to our languages—and what it means to let them go.

* * *

I WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE *several individuals. To my family who support me in my journey to reclaim and hold on to Tagalog: Maraming salamat sa inyong lahat, ang minamahal kong kamag-anak. To the members of the Pakin Atoll community who have continuously supported me during my Peace Corps service and my linguistic fieldwork: Kilissou shaapwúr áámi mwonson reen ióómi alillis sangei loomw toorei iei. I am thankful to Ryan Likeke Alivado, Dalton-Blake Keanu Beauprez, Robert Blust, David Dugucanavanua, Akiemi Glenn, Liperto Linge, Te Raukura Roa, Apay (Ai-yu) Tang, and Julie Walsh for the inspiring discussions on which this dialogue is based. I especially thank Anthony P S Guerrero, Michele K Johnson (Sʔímlaʔxʷ), Karnim Judah, Alexander Mawyer, Kenneth L Rehḡ, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier version of this paper. All errors in this work are mine alone.*

Notes

1 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this reminder.

2 As an anonymous reviewer points out, most of these cited examples discuss language loss in the homeland for languages with relatively small numbers of speakers. The discourses in language endangerment emphasize repeatedly that when children no longer acquire such languages as the primary means of communication (ie, the first language or “mother tongue”), then the languages are in real danger of becoming extinct.

3 Such a statement requires empirical investigation. From my own experience, none of my generational cohort from my hometown in the United States have taken classes to learn Tagalog, and none of them have visited the Philippines for a period of time long enough to learn Tagalog. Hinton’s point, however, is well taken: the opportunities for children in immigrant diasporas to reclaim their language in academic or naturalistic settings are usually much more readily available than the opportunities for numerically smaller minority indigenous groups who continue to reside on or near their traditional homelands.

4 As I discuss in Odango forthcoming a, many academics who are focused on language endangerment and the corresponding loss of global linguistic diversity often disregard the language shift and loss happening in immigrant diasporas as not being an urgent matter. That is, even though there is language loss in immigrant diasporas, the languages are still relatively healthy in the homeland with large numbers of speakers; such is not the case for other endangered languages with small numbers of speakers in the homeland. Although I agree that language loss in the homeland context is different from that in the diasporic context (see, eg, Hinton 2001, 3; Wyman, McCarty, and Nicholas 2014, 5–6), I do not find it useful to disregard the latter or to separate those discussions from those about the former. Regardless of “how endangered” the language is that a young person speaks (or is trying to re-learn), and regardless of whether the youth in question is a heritage speaker of, for example, Tagalog (with approximately twenty-four million speakers worldwide) or of Kapingamarangi (with approximately three thousand speakers worldwide), her or his experiences are worthy of ethnographic study leading to solutions-based action.

5 I have explicit permission from Karnim to use her real name in this discussion.

6 The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) values for the orthographic symbols used for Mortlockese are as follows: <á> = [æ], <é> = [ɛ], <ú> = [u], <ó> = [ɔ], <mw> = [m^w], <ng> = [ŋ], <pw> = [p^w], <ch> = [ts] or [tʃ], <sh> = [ʃ], <CC> = [C:], <VV> = [V:]. Other symbols such as <s> and <o> have their expected IPA values. Regarding transcription conventions, I use the following symbols: ellipses (. . .) for pauses; em-dashes (—) for sudden breaks; double hyphens (--) for omitted material; forward slashes (/ /) for materials spoken with a “quotative” qual-

ity usually corresponding to higher pitch and faster speech rate; braces ({ }) for transcription notes; brackets ([]) for overlapping speech; commas (,) for comma intonation; periods (.) for declarative sentence falling intonation; and question marks (?) for rising intonation. When translating Mortlockese text, I use punctuation marks (namely, commas, periods, and question marks) following English orthography.

7 The “Fil-Am” label primarily applies to Filipinos living in the US diaspora (ie, Americans of Filipino descent); it is not necessarily a label of ethnic or racial identity (ie, “half Filipino, half American/Caucasian”), as immigrants from the Philippines to the United States are also subsumed under the “Fil-Am” label.

8 I make these assertions based on linguistic criteria (syllable rate, range of lexical items, phonological characteristics, relative infrequency of false starts in conversation, etc), although I admit that these are my subjective impressions rather than quantitative measurements. I acknowledge that for all my ethnographic or qualitative descriptions of bilingualism in the current and the following sections of this essay, formal quantitative assessment can be used to determine degrees of bilingualism, language dominance, language attrition, and so forth. Such assessments must be reserved for future study.

9 The spelling “Satawan” reflects the endonymic (self-determined) pronunciation of Mortlockese-speaking residents of Pohnpei and Pakin who trace their ancestry to Satowan Islet in the Mortlocks. Similarly, while the spellings “Lekinioch,” “Lukunoch,” “Lukunor,” and “Lukuno” are used by Mortlockese communities in their home islands as endonyms, the spelling “Lukunosh” reflects the endonymic pronunciation of Mortlockese-speaking residents of Pohnpei and Pakin.

10 I must qualify that “accept” is a personal stance in which I understand and respect other people’s choices to define their Filipino identities in ways other than speaking a Philippine language, yet such choices do not define me as a Filipino—that is, I choose to build my identity on the foundation of speaking the heritage language.

11 The *e* in between those two morphemes is best analyzed as an epenthetic vowel, that is, it is an extra sound inserted in a word.

12 Apay was a 2011 recipient of a Genographic Legacy Fund Grant from the National Geographic Society (National Geographic Genographic Project nd) to study the status of her language in her native village of Qowgan in Taiwan (UHM Department of Linguistics 2011).

13 For the sake of parsimonious presentation of the excerpt in this section, I do not include in the transcriptions relatively irrelevant material such as repeated words or syllables associated with false starts (eg, that—that—that); back channel replies from the hearer that overlap with the speaker’s utterances (eg, yeah, mm hm); discourse fillers (eg, uh and um); long pauses associated with such discourse fillers; and other interlocutor noises (eg, clearing of throat, coughs).

14 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion that I emphasize this point.

15 Among many other examples in the literature, consider also the account by Yuko Otsuka and Andrew Wong about the diasporic Tokelauan youth living in Hawai'i who, on seeing cultural performances by Tokelauan youth who were visiting from the homeland, urged their parents to teach them Tokelauan language and culture (2007, 242).

16 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, in the Pacific context, constructions of identity are particularly strong at local levels compared to the "pan-Pacific" level.

17 A brief example based on the Austronesian languages I focus on in this essay: it never fails to amaze me that a word such as the number "five" can be so resistant to change over time: Tagalog *lima*, Mortlockese *lima-* (in compounds), Pohnpeian *limahu*, Truku *lima*, Fijian *lima*, and so forth.

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Abstract

This dialogue piece addresses the relative lack of youth perspectives in the academic literature on language shift, endangerment, reclamation, and maintenance. One of the most important ways to address the matter of intergenerational language shift is to encourage the further integration of youth perspectives into these academic discourses, especially (but not exclusively) perspectives written by young scholars who are speaker-members of communities in which language shift is occurring. Through such perspectives, we can gain more nuanced understandings of youth perceptions about language shift in their communities, the effects on their linguistic identities, and their motivations for reclaiming (or letting go of) their ancestral/heritage languages. In this dialogue piece, I explore perspectives shared with me by members of my generational cohort as a way of telling other stories of youth who are engaged in lifelong journeys of holding on to and reclaiming their languages for reasons that are inherently tied to personal identi-

ties. By the nature of the array of languages I discuss in this essay, an Austronesian perspective emerges, one that I draw on for personal inspiration: the challenges I face as a Filipino are shared by other members of my cohort who are of Austronesian ancestry. It is an immeasurable amount of support knowing that there are other young Austronesians like me who are fighting to hold on to their languages against all odds. This dialogue piece is a contribution to the growing literature on youth perspectives in the academic discourses on language shift, endangerment, reclamation, and maintenance.

KEYWORDS: language reclamation, language maintenance, Austronesian, youth